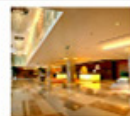




We believe you are at your best when you can truly be yourself. Holiday Inn is one place you always can.



Home ▶ Guidebooks ▶ Shopping ▶ Classifieds

[Sign Up](#)

[Login](#) ▼

URBANATOMY.com

Shanghai | [PRD](#) | [Beijing](#)

The official home of **that's** Magazines



Article ▼



[News & Features](#) ▶

[Bars & Clubs](#) ▶

[Restaurants](#) ▶

[Life & Style](#) ▶

[Arts & Culture](#) ▶

[Events](#)

[Home](#) » [News & Features](#) » [Urban Future \(Blog\)](#) » Detail

Neomodernity

by nickland @ Friday, 22 April 2011 12:23



When it comes to Shanghai modernity, just once wasn't enough

Claims to have discovered, or invented, the neomodern, neomodernity, or neomodernism have been announced in fields as varied as the fine arts, political and moral philosophy, theology, economics, memetics, chess, and apparently bathroom design. In sociology, Ulrich Beck's 'second modernity' is a close equivalent.

As with modernism and postmodernism, it is architecture that is central to the enduring public definition of neomodernity. Philosophers have only ever interpreted the world, but architects get to build it. Although still inchoate, a neomodern architectural landscape is quite unmistakably under construction. This is especially evident in Shanghai.

When guided by actual architectural construction, the thread leading to Shanghai neomodernity begins in Turin, with Renzo Piano's 1989 'restoration' of the Fiat Lingotto Factory. This work was exemplary in a number of respects. It balanced creation with renovation, radically upgrading and re-purposing an existing, large-scale structure, whilst venerating the original. The factory was already an iconic modernist edifice, immortalized in Le Corbusier's Vers une Architecture (1923). Piano's multi-use design mixed functional revolution with structural conservation. Hyper-contemporary features (including a rooftop bubble and new window system) employed light, transparent materials, in order to minimize structural (whilst maximizing functional) impact. In this way, an industrial plant was transformed into a hotel, leisure, exhibition and conference space, through aesthetic recapitulation of industrial heritage. The neomodern template had been laid.

ADVERTISEMENT



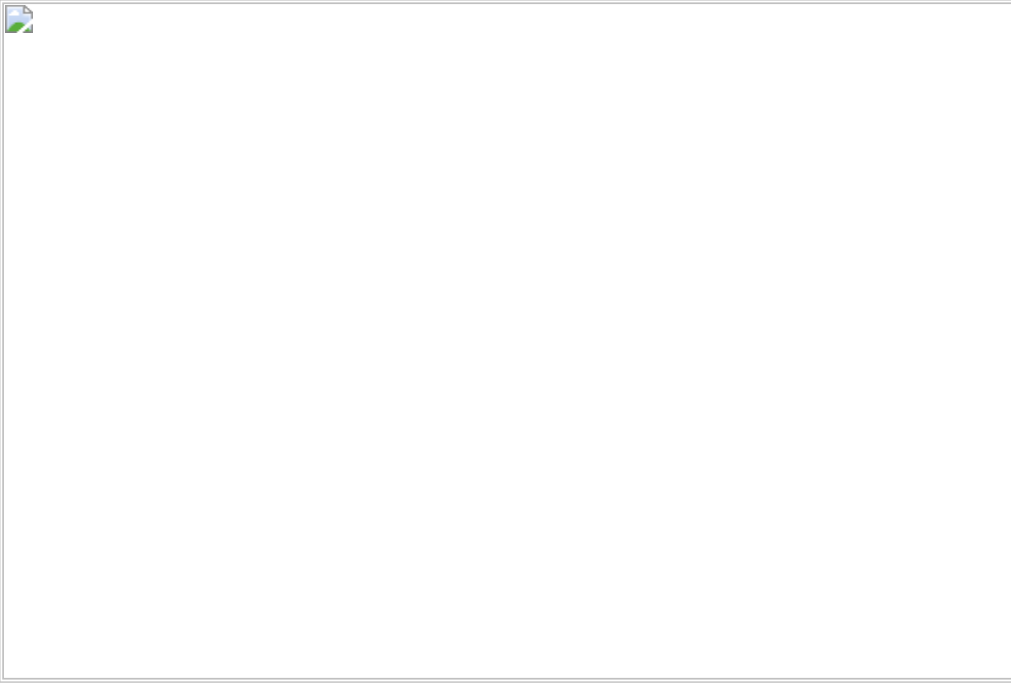
Video



ADVERTISEMENT

Local Blogs

- 1 Schoolboys Cross-Dress For Girls'
- 2 Student slapped by teacher
- 3 Smart Car: Kobe Bryant Is "Big, In
- 4 Fool's gold: Why Youku is a sell
- 5 Chinese scientists discover way to



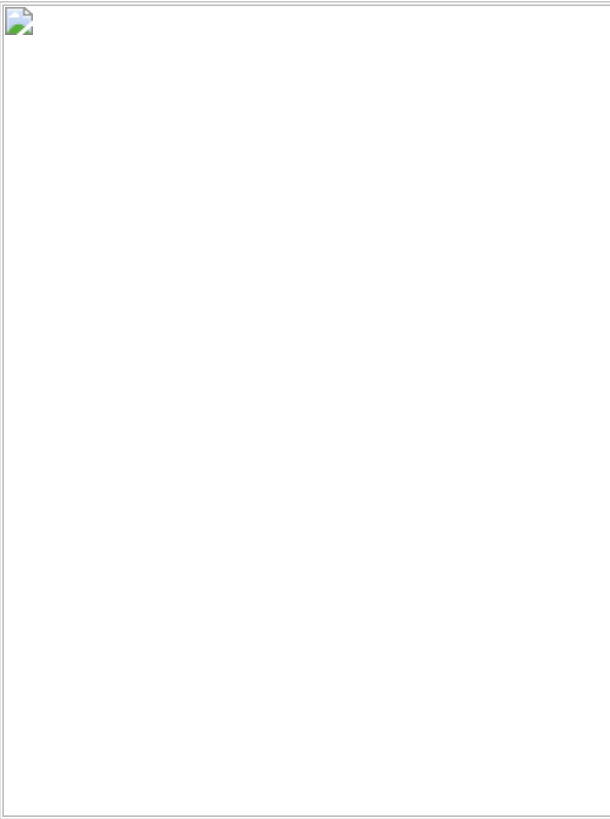
It might reasonably be argued that the modern is always and inherently neomodern, that relentless are hard-wired into it, from the beginning. Yet the complicating prefix is important and informative. Rather than expressing smooth, continuous improvement, neomodern construction manifests, as Modernity is split and becomes, in part, past. The semi-paradoxical notion of 'modernist heritage' animating, inspiration.

Modernity dates awkwardly, and intriguingly, because it positions itself upon the leading edge of from the future. In its vital, colloquial sense, the 'modern' is an indexical term that describes what recently. It is in this sense that modernization remains irrepressibly up-to-date, anchored, indexical slip unanchored from the 'now' into the dead waters of history is thus to forsake the claim to modern past cannot be modern, and the modern cannot be simply past.

Whilst 'vulgar' by the standards of intellectual and technical usage, it is this popular sense of the intense, agitational force. Even amongst the intelligentsia, postmodernism drew its powers of incomprehensible claim to inhabit a moment beyond now. Whilst it is no great stretch to make the 'now' compatible with intuition, to float a contemporary state on the far side of now invites stimulus. 'now' is especially interesting in this regard, by the way – 'xianzai' is literally where we are 'first a beginning arithmetically.)

In the fine arts, the consensual distinction between the 'modern' and the 'contemporary' resolves draining the word 'modern' of its colloquial and provocative sense, leaving only a husk of historical. these words and movements, however, is to insist that modernity, even primordial modernity, res accomplished history, because it relates to an absolute future. The dynamized now of modernity moment in time. What modernity discovered, and perpetually recalls, was not just the next thing ahead in general, and perhaps even the road.

Shanghai reached escape velocity into neomodernity comparatively recently. The turn-of-the-millennium for instance, was a mile-stone in urban restoration, but was only embryonically, and perhaps also far clearer example of the architectural trends represented by Piano is found at the Red Town development 2004.



The archetypal neomodern project is a 'creative cluster', and Red Town is no exception. It consists of an industrial site, re-animated as an arts and leisure hub. At its geographical edge, and conceptual core, is the Shanghai Steel Company's old No.10 Steel Plant, now home to the Shanghai Sculpture Space (SSS). In this style, the monumental relics of heavy industry have been embraced and re-vitalized – not merely re-transfigured.

In the first years of the SSS, huge pieces of rusted machinery, extracted from the re-purposed building and alongside the outdoor sculptures, as if deliberately scrambling the boundaries of art and sculpture, notably a jumble of massive gutters that once served as conduits for molten metal, have been re-contextualized as artworks.

At the heart of the neomodern lies something akin to a field of ruins, yet there is nothing remote or forgotten. They attest more strongly to resilient – if interrupted -- survival, than to disappearance and a new renaissance.

Above all, perhaps, the neomodern is manifested indirectly, through display spaces. It points away from what it revives, in the manner of contemporary museum design, with its ideal of invisible mediation. In the information age, in which subtlety trumps assertion, inventive perception supplants self-expression, and outperforms stubborn purpose.

"We want to demolish museums and libraries" Marinetti declared, in his futurist manifesto, raging against the past. Yet, to make a museum exhibit of modernity is not to mortify, but rather the opposite. The modern is conspicuously demonstrated by the fact that it has not remained what it was. The death of the old is the birth of the new.

The Shanghai neomodern style is at once jarringly crude and hyper-refined, orchestrating a hard (yet softened) contrast between heavy metal remnants and intangible design. It exults in the most cyclopean, stressed, and time-worn elements: rusted girders, massive chains, vast slabs of semi-crumbled brickwork, pitted concrete, splintered and eroded shells of warehouses and machine shops. Its preferred heritage components are characterized by a brutal, industrial functionalism, expressed on a mind-crushing scale.

Around and amongst these paleo-modernist dinosaur skeletons, it weaves an exquisite web of modern, near-transparent structures, emphasizing lightness, subtlety, openness, and innovation. High-bar stools, sleek communications, intelligent environmental control systems, hydroponically-nourished creeping plants, tastefully understated interior decoration and sophisticated artworks complete the modern aesthetic.

Neomodernity is at once more modernity, and modernity again. By synthesizing (accelerating) premodernity and modernity, it produces a distinctive schema or figure: the time spiral. But that is to get a little beyond the metaphor.

Postscript

With peculiar synchronicity, half an hour after posting this, a copy of Wonsuk Chang's essay 'Reflections on Time and Space in the Yijing' arrived in my inbox. The article ends:

"Time in the Yijing may serve a conservative purpose -- namely, restoring the past. But it also serves a progressive purpose -- namely, producing novelty. These two aspects of time do not contradict each other. Many passages in the Yijing that restore the past simultaneously involves some element of novel creation. The process begins with a return to the past, and finally reaches the point where creative novelty emerges. This evolutionary process is a spiral, which ever produces novelty while simultaneously returning again and again to the nascent past."

Comments

Leave a Comment

Submit

Urbanatomy Media Products



All Rights Reserved. [Urbanatomy Media](#) - Shanghai, Beijing & Pearl River Delta. China

[沪ICP备08007913号](#)